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ABSTRACT

This brief paper summarizes a roundtable discussion on the relative lack of use by special education researchers of a variety of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Discussion addressed: (1) the types of knowledge that could be generated by using a wider range of research methods (e.g., structural equation modeling and associated methods can be useful in building theory and generating testable hypotheses); (2) reasons for the limited methods used in special education research (e.g., quantitative research is more likely to be funded); and (3) change strategies (e.g., improve education of potential researchers and advocate to funding agencies for knowledgeable review of qualitative research proposals). A table shows results of an analysis of the frequency of qualitative and quantitative research genre in five journals in the special education field. (DB)

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PLURALIZING RESEARCH OPTIONS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION:[1] A Roundtable Discussion

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Statement of the Problem: Most of the published work in special education is confined to hypothesis-testing, survey, and case study methods (See Table 1). In allied fields such as literacy, multiculturalism, and critical pedagogy, however, researchers are using a wide variety of research methods of both qualitative (eg., ethnographic and discourse analysis) and quantitative (eg., structural equation modeling and quasi-experimental studies) to great advantage.

Discussion Questions:

1. *What types of knowledge could we contribute to expand the knowledge base by using a wider range of methods and approaches?*
   Responses included:

   Every method or approach provides a different window on reality. Consequently, a variety of methods can lead to a compatible, integrated, and richer multidimensional study of our field.

   Alan Peshkin's paper in the March issue of the Educational Researcher was mentioned. Peshkin argues that qualitative studies can add new data with respect to description, interpretation, verification, and evaluation.

   Structural equation modeling and associated methods (eg., latent variables, causal modeling, partial least squares and latent growth curve analyses) can provide insights into both complexity and interrelations among variables in ways that the typical *t*, *F*, and *R2* tests cannot. Such models can be useful in building theory and generating testable hypotheses.

2. *Why is Special Education research so narrowly limited? What are the factors that lead to the maintenance of the status quo?*
   Responses included:

   Resources of time and money needed to learn and carry out theory-driven, labor-intensive approaches is scarce.

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[1] Presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, Georgia, April, 1993.

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Special educators often have limited training in research methods.

The field tends toward isolation and conservatism.

Journal editors are often reluctant to publish work that does not fit the traditional, and therefore acceptable, mold.

Positivism has led to a preference for the conception of variables as concrete entities, rather than as latent aggregates.

Quantitative research fares better with funding agencies.

3. *Which factors can we influence? How do we go about affecting change? What can we do with the discussion that we have had here today?*

Responses included:

Write letters to the editors of our journals.

Educate our doctoral students and colleagues through symposia, articles, and courses.

Advocate to funding agencies (e.g., OSEP) for qualitative research proposals to be reviewed by colleagues knowledgeable in technique.

REVIEW OF RESEARCH GENRE IN REPRESENTATIVE JOURNALS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION: 1988-1992*

	Quantitative		Qualitative		Lit. Reviews and Position Papers
	H-T	H-G	Survey	Case Study	
Journal of the Association for persons with Severe Handicaps	54%	0%	11%	19%	18%
Exceptional Children	65%	0%	12%	12%	12%
American Journal of Mental Retardation	68%	2%	3.5%	1%	26%
American Annals of The Deaf	52%	1%	23%	0%	22%
Journal of Learning Disabilities	45%	0%	1%	0%	53%

* Because we rounded the percentages, the totals do not always equal 100%.

Quantitative:

H-T	Hypothesis Testing	Significance tests, such as *F, T,* R^2 values, norming of assessments, and instructional surveys.
H-G	Hypothesis Generating	Model-building analyses, such as path analysis, partial least squares, and latent growth curves.